

PRESS RELEASE



## Reports of Significant Progress in Fight Against Malaria

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**SEATTLE, 17 October 2007** - Significant gains in the fight against malaria in sub-Saharan Africa are being made, according to a new report released today. The report, *Malaria and Children*, prepared by UNICEF on behalf of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership (RBM), contains a comprehensive assessment of the progress that has been made in malaria control.

"In Sub-Saharan Africa, Malaria kills at least 800,000 children under the age of five each year," said UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman. "Controlling malaria is vital to improving child health and economic development in affected countries. Studies show that malaria disproportionately affects the poorest people in these countries, and so contributes to their further impoverishment."

The report shows that, from 2004 to 2006, there has been a rapid increase in the supply of insecticide-treated nets, with annual production of nets more than doubling from 30 to 63 million. Another large increase in production is expected by the end of 2007.

The number of these nets procured by UNICEF more than tripled in the two years to 2006 to nearly 25 million and is more than 20 times greater today than in 2000. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS Tuberculosis and Malaria, a public-private partnership that provides health funding, has also increased its distribution of insecticide treated nets from 1.35 million in 2004 to 18 million in 2006, and other major donors have scaled up their activities.

Along with this increase in supply have come improvements in the distribution of nets to those communities in greatest need. Distribution of the nets and other malaria interventions have been successfully incorporated into existing maternal and child health, immunization and antenatal care programmes.

The 20 Sub-Saharan African countries for which trend data are available have made major progress in expanding the use of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs) for children. Sixteen of the 20 have at least tripled their coverage since 2000. Coverage in Gambia has reached around half of all children, and coverage in Sao Tome and Principe, Guinea-Bissau and Togo is now about 40 per cent. Some other countries have very recently completed mass distributions of ITNs, and these distribution efforts are expected to be reflected in the next round of data. Some 18 million nets have been distributed in Ethiopia since that country's last household survey in 2005.

"This new data is encouraging and sets the stage for more dramatic gains in the coming years," said Dr Coll-Seck, Executive Director of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership. "The goal of the RBM Partnership is to achieve 80 per cent coverage with all anti-malarial interventions by 2010 - we are moving in the right direction but we need to do much more."

Across sub-Saharan Africa, 34 per cent of children with fever receive antimalarial medicines, although few countries have increased their coverage since 2000 and many of the children being treated are receiving less effective medicines.

However the report reveals that nearly all sub-Saharan African countries have changed their national drug policies to support the use of artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACT), a new and more effective malaria treatment. Major funding initiatives are now providing support for countries to purchase these newer and more effective medicines, leading to a significant increase in ACT procurement since 2005. Many more children are expected to receive effective malaria treatment in coming years.

Underpinning progress at the country level is a dramatic increase in funding available for national malaria control programs. International support to national programs has increased more than ten-fold over the past ten years. These recent gains create, for the first time, a strong foundation from which countries can make rapid progress towards reducing the impact of malaria.

However, overall ITN usage still falls short of global targets and not enough children are receiving effective treatment. To overcome these remaining hurdles, enhanced commitments by donors and bolder efforts by national governments are needed to accelerate the scaling up of malaria programmes. The report recommends that these efforts include community-based programming and continued integration of malaria programming into existing service delivery mechanisms.

### **Further Information**

The Roll Back Malaria (RBM) Partnership was launched in 1998 by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and The World Bank to provide a coordinated global approach to fighting malaria. It now includes a wide range of partners—including malaria-endemic countries, the private sector, nongovernmental and community-based organizations, and research institutions.

### **About UNICEF**

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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